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THE MCMAHON LINE

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The McMahon Line, which delineates the 850-mile Indo-Tibetan border between Bhutan and Burma, was drawn in 1914 in connection with a tripartite British-Tibetan-Chinese conference held at Simla, India, to discuss Tibetan affairs. This conference opened in October 1913 and lasted for about six months. The Convention agreed to at the conference divided Tibet into Inner and Outer Zones, recognized Chinese suzerainty over Tibet, contained engagements that China would not convert Tibet into a Chinese province and that Britain would not annex any portion of Tibet, recognized the autonomy of Outer Tibet, and made arrangements for trade agencies and military escorts established at Lhasa and Gyantze. The description of the McMahon line constituted a part of this Convention. The Convention was duly signed and ratified by the governments of British India and Tibet but not by the Chinese government in Peiping. The McMahon Line, which follows the crestline of the Himalayan watershed, has never been demarcated by ground markers.

SIR ARTHUR HENRY MCMAHON

Sir Henry McMahon, for whom the McMahon Line is named, graduated from Sandhurst in 1882 and began his career in India, joining the 1st Sikh regiment of the Punjab Frontier Force in 1885. He joined the Indian Political Department in 1890 and acted as political agent on the Northwest Frontier. He went to Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1893 with the Durand Mission, which drew the boundary between what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan.

McMahon himself demarcated the boundary between Baluchistan and Afghanistan between 1894 and 1896. He was knighted in 1906 and remained in the Northwest Frontier area until 1911. In that year McMahon became Foreign Secretary to the government of India. In 1913-14 he was British Plenipotentiary for the Treaty regarding Tibet between Britain, Tibet, and China. In 1914, he became First High Commissioner in Egypt and in 1919 was British Commissioner on the Middle East International Commission (Peace Conference). McMahon's diplomatic career ended at about this time; he died in 1949.